

# Tornadoes

Tornadoes are violently rotating columns of air that descend from thunderstorm clouds to come in contact with the ground. They typically develop when the following atmospheric ingredients come together:

- a supply of warm, humid air near the surface
- a nearby low pressure disturbance to help lift the air and create thunderstorms
- strong atmospheric winds increasing with height

Most tornadoes in Alabama occur during two main times of the year. The Spring Severe Weather Season occurs in March, April, and May, and the Fall Severe Weather Season occurs in November and early December. They typically occur between noon and 8 pm. However, they have occurred in every hour of each day and night, so no time is immune from tornadoes.



F3 Tornado, Foley (Baldwin County)  
October 13, 2001

Tornadoes have wind speeds that vary from as little as 50 mph to speeds in excess of 300 mph. They move with the thunderstorms that produces them with forward motions varying from nearly stationary to 70 mph. Most thunderstorms producing tornadoes travel from the southwest toward the northeast.

**Remember, tornadoes form quickly! You may have only a few seconds to react and find shelter. When a tornado threatens, your immediate action can save your life! Know what to do and where to go!**

## Safety Rules

**BE** Calm  
Smart  
Safe

### In schools, nursing homes, hospitals, factories, and shopping centers:

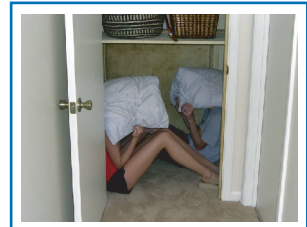
Go to a pre-designated shelter area. Basements are the best, but interior hallways on the lowest floor usually offer protection. Close all doors to the hallway for



Severe Weather  
**SHELTER**

### In homes or small buildings:

Go to the basement or a small interior room such as a closet, a bathroom, or an interior hallway on the lowest level. If available, get under something sturdy like a heavy table. Protect yourself from flying debris with pillows, heavy coats, blankets, or quilts. Use bicycle or motorcycle helmets, if available, to protect your head.



**Stay away from windows!** Do not bother opening or closing them. It will not protect the structure. You will waste time and put yourself and possibly others at greater risk. Use those valuable seconds to find a place of safety.

**Stay away from doors and outside walls!**

**Protect your head!**



### In mobile homes or vehicles:

Leave them and go to a strong building. If there is no shelter nearby, get into the nearest ditch, depression, or underground culvert and lie flat with your hands shielding your head.



Photo courtesy of Sam Barricklow

<http://www.k5kj.net/index.htm>